

Report Writing, Correspondence and Filing

and other necessary capacities

Report Writing

In the previous part we saw that it is quite easy to organise material into a whole piece of work, in outline, using a Tony Buzan-style “Mind Map”, “The Buzan Organic Study Method”, and other such techniques.

All of what Buzan has to say about reading and study is relevant to the topic of report writing, and especially relevant to the preparation stage of report-writing.

In a report, you must be concrete, which is the same as being organic. The true meaning of the word “concrete” is the combination of the (“abstract”) parts of a whole situation in such a way that it can be understood as a “unity and struggle of opposites”.

This is what Lenin referred to as “concrete analysis of a concrete situation”. It corresponds very well with the typical form of Buzan’s “mind-maps”.

A concrete, organic approach to report-writing will help you to make your report as brief as possible.

The length of any report should be tailored to fit the amount of time a reader, person or committee may have available to deal with it. This might be as little as fifteen minutes, or half an hour for something more important. Such might be the only opportunity for the matter to be considered, and for the people to give attention to it.

Success of a report should be judged by whether it can give rise to an appropriate decision, in the available time.

Therefore everything possible should be done to help the recipients of a report to understand its conclusions.

This can be done in the first place by presenting the report “backwards”. The conclusions should be made very clear on the first page.

This might be done with a paragraph headed “Summary”, or “Conclusions”. There is no point in being shy about this.

Empirical facts can be given, or summarised, in an addendum, if necessary.

Tabulations (spreadsheets) often help to concentrate the presentation of data in a small space, and with a prominent “bottom line”.

Your audience will undoubtedly appreciate it if your report is the proverbial “one-pager”, or else a “two-page report” which can be printed back-to-back on one sheet of paper.

If it is a bit longer, then it may be possible to print it legibly as a four-page folding “booklet”, so that it is still on one sheet of paper.

Write in Prose

Prose is in paragraphs, and has a beginning, middle and end. Prose does not rely on bullets, numbers, letters or other listing mechanisms.

Correspondence

The Secretary of any structure is responsible for its correspondence, and especially for its letters or official e-mails. Responsible for receiving them, for replying to them, and for keeping the messages received and sent and copies of replies. The secretary must report correspondence to the organisation in a way that is regular, convenient and timely.

Filing

Filing is the storage of documents in a classified manner such that they can be searched by date, or alphabetically, or by some numbered referencing or catalogue system.

Files and a hole-puncher used to be the tools of filing. But now, files are kept in computers, and sometimes in both forms.

Other necessary capacities

Computers

Not much has changed in the last 20 years. The most necessary programmes are still four in number: word processing, spreadsheets, e-mail and Internet-browsing.

Typically, people use MS-Word and Excel for words and numbers.

E-mail software is a little more varied: Outlook is good, but so is Thunderbird. In browsers, Google Chrome is good, but .

A little capacity for simple manipulation of image-files is good to have. This can be got from the free programme called "Paint" that comes with "Windows".

Layout

The appearance of documents has a major effect on whether they are read and understood, or not. This is a factor that is relatively, though not completely, independent of the text, or content

A well-laid-out document will go further. It will be read and absorbed by far more people than if the same text is badly produced.

Hence layout, which at first seems to be a subjective matter having to do with taste and pride, turns out to be an objective factor which eventually becomes an iron necessity.

This is because documents compete for attention. The documents of the revolutionaries have to be presented well if they are to stand a chance of getting the attention that they must have, if they are to be effective, and have consequences.

Presentation is equally a factor, whether the documents are internal, or external to any given organisation or structure of an organisation.

Venues

Just as the presentation of text on paper, or on a screen, strongly affects the take-up of any message, and so becomes a major material factor, so also does the layout of any venue for gathering, as well as the acoustics of a venue.

Venues can be considered as being of three types. The first is the “**boardroom**”, or “council chamber”. This type of arrangement is conducive to participation by all those present, in more-or-less equal degrees of prominence. An oval table is better than a rectangle, for example.

This is the type of venue that the Communist University uses, and looks for.

The second type is “**classroom**”, or a lecture theatre. It is suitable for lectures. It gives prominence and priority to the platform. It disadvantages the floor. It is conducive to “questions of clarity” but not to “contributions”.

The third is the “**stadium**”, which is equivalent to the “classroom” but on a larger scale. A stadium works well for rallies. Audience participation does take place, but only in forms such as cheering and singing, or of booing and walking out.

Timetable and Agenda

This is an induction course, designed to show how structures work. If they are not given “quality” time, they cannot work. If agendas are filled with ad hoc tasks, and if the organic functioning of the organisation is consequently denied time, then it is going to die away.

In COSATU, Shop Stewards Councils are turned into rallies and demonstrations. In the SACP, gatherings at all levels are turned into no more than distributions of tasks by leadership. In the ANC, branch activity is suppressed or suspended. None of these are invariable tendencies but all of them do exist.

It is the healthy functioning of the base units of the organisations that regenerates and cleans the organisations. It has to be given time.

Course: Induction

24053, Report Writing, Correspondence and Filing

1089 words